

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Most or Flanagan - Int. 5634

For Release to PM's, MAY 30, 1962

# SKIN DIVERS TAKING FISH CENSUS

Salt-water fish along all coasts of the United States are being tallied in an underwater census now underway, the Department of the Interior said today.

The census, known as the Memorial Day Fish Count, began May 26 and will last through June 3. It consists of identifying, counting, and recording salt-water fish by 70 census teams in 16 coastal States. The teams vary from three to 15 persons and include men, women, and teenagers.

The census takers are 400 skin diver volunteers of the American Littoral Society, an organization of amateur underwater naturalists, with headquarters at Sandy Hook, N. J. The program is coordinated by the Sandy Hook Marine Laboratory of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Divers will list as many of the United States marine fishes as they can find during the nine-day period. In a pilot study held last summer, 24 test teams counted 23,000 fish of 93 species. These ranged from one-inch long angel fish to twelve-foot tiger sharks.

The American Littoral Society seeks to encourage underwater study of shore life by direct observation of fishes and other marine animals, assist members in solving problems of a scientific nature, foster public information about shore life and public awareness of needs for conservation action, and act as "eyes" for marine scientists.

For years, marine biologists have been troubled over their inability to make simultaneous observations of the distribution and abundance of fishes over their entire range, which, in some cases, may be thousands of miles along the coast. The planned fish counts will help fill this gap and answer such questions as where migratory fish come from, where they go, and where their centers of abundance are. Further study of the data collected during the census is expected to give some clues on why fish distribution and abundance are patterned the way they are.

Director Daniel H. Janzen of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife hailed the skin divers' efforts as "a fine example of the growing interest of our people in conservation activities."

The present fish count will be followed by two others later in the year--one on the Fourth of July and another on Labor Day.